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COMMITTEE ON RULES

Congress of the United States
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May 19, 2005

Secretary Anthony Principi
Chairman
Base Realignment and Closure Commission
Washington, D.C.

Dear Secretary Principi:

The Department of Defense has recommended that the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) commission realign the 130th Airlift Wing of the West Virginia Air National Guard by moving its entire fleet of eight C-130 aircraft from Yeager Airport Air Guard Station in Charleston, WV to Pope Air Force Base in North Carolina.

I am writing in strong opposition to this recommendation and to invite the BRAC commission to visit the men and women of the 130th Airlift Wing, one of our nation's top rated guard units, to see first hand the important role the fleet of C-130 aircraft plays in defending our freedom and serving the citizens of West Virginia.

The 130th Airlift Wing is one of the most successful and experienced units in our nation's National Guard. The unit has the eighth best unit strength and the fifth best retention rate in the entire National Guard, and is consistently rated one of the top performing National Guard units in our military.

The Air Guard personnel based at Yeager are among the best at using C-130 aircraft to transport soldiers, supplies, and critical cargo into the war zone – they have been doing it for the past twenty years. In fact, members of the 130th Airlift Wing were the first Guard unit to do a night vision goggle landing when they delivered U.S. Commandos to the front line of the War on Terror during Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Keeping the fleet of C-130 aircraft stationed at Yeager makes sense because the aircraft play a critical role in transporting West Virginia based soldiers to and from critical training venues. Without swift access to air transportation these soldiers lose critical training time they need to be ready when their country calls on them.

I urge members of the commission to pay close attention to the role the West Virginia Air Guard's fleet of C-130 aircraft plays during state emergencies such as floods, which annually ravage local communities.

The commission should know that the Air Guard Station at Yeager Airport is ripe for expansion and is capable of supporting eighteen additional C-130 aircraft. Local officials have taken steps to expand space at the airfield controlled by the Air Guard to allow for up to twenty-six C-130 aircraft. Local officials are eager to work with the military to expand and fortify the 130th Airlift Wing rather than abandon a critical outpost.

The proposed realignment impacts at least 246 fulltime and part time jobs dealing a tremendous blow to the region's economy. Additionally, the removal of the C-130 aircraft would end a partnership between the Air Guard and Yeager Airport's commercial and general aviation, causing Yeager to incur significant extra cost, for fire and emergency services, and making Yeager a likely candidate to lose its 24 hour air traffic control center.

The citizens of West Virginia expect the BRAC commission to give a thorough evaluation of the Department of Defense's recommendations before affirming the recommendation. The commission's visit will show how the Secretary of Defense deviated from the established military and economic criteria when recommending the realignment of the 130th Airlift Wing.

The unit has served with honor in Iraq, Afghanistan, Kosovo, and other wars and humanitarian missions around the globe. To close this unit in the midst of the War on Terror would be a mistake that would hurt our nation's military readiness.

I eagerly await your response.

Sincerely,



Shelley Moore Capito, M.C.